

April 22, 2004

Dr. Teresa Long
Commissioner, Department of Health
240 Parsons Avenue
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Dr. Long:

Thank you for the work you have carried out during the last several weeks, I know that the death of Lt. Brandon Ratliff had a deep emotional impact on Health Department staff members. At the same time, Veterans, families and friends from all across the state have expressed their pain, as well as their disappointment, and this letter follows our efforts to address questions and concerns over the employment situation of Lt. Ratliff.

We have carried out a thorough examination of the facts surrounding Lt. Brandon Ratliff's return to employment at the Health Department from active military duty in Afghanistan. Attached you will find our Chronology of Events, Key Findings and Recommendations.

The Findings indicate that there were serious breakdowns in communications within the Health Department's decision-making process for the 2003 budget; with Human resources decisions; and in communication with Lt Ratliff, his supervisors and his co-workers. The lack of communication and ineffective supervision described in the Findings precluded a sensitive, effective and thoughtful handling of the situation. While the findings do show that Title 38 was taken into consideration, along with the Civil Service and contract rules, there clearly were missed opportunities to handle this situation and this employee's needs with greater sensitivity.

I know that you and your staff will work with us in implementing the various Citywide Veterans Services recommendations to help make sure that such a situation never happens again, but I also ask that you spend time with your employees and managers to address the communications issues. There are specific concerns with the interaction of budget teams, supervisors and Health's Human Resources Officer. These management teams must communicate and cooperate for the Department to improve.

We work hard to be the best, and we know that difficult budgets have led to difficult times, but as a Director I must ask you to do more, not only on the major issues of the day, but also to require better communication and use of discretion by your employees as they serve Columbus' residents.

I look forward to working with you as we implement these changes, as we commit to the highest level of service to our veterans, and as we continue our shared mission of service for the families of Columbus.

Sincerely,

Michael B. Coleman
Mayor

(MBC/ms/mb)